

A. Amendments to the Claims

Please amend the claims as follows:

1-12. (Canceled)

13. (Currently amended) A method for producing a biodegradable ~~block for models~~ model, comprising the steps of:

forming a biodegradable plastic material comprising a biodegradable polymer into a desired form, said biodegradable polymer comprising (a) an esterified starch having a degree of substitution (DS) of about 0.4 or more and (b) an esterified cellulose having a DS of about 0.4 or more, in a ratio by weight (a)/(b), of from 10/0 to 1/9;

placing said biodegradable plastic material into a mold;

melting said biodegradable plastic material in said mold using heat; and

shaping into a block said biodegradable plastic material in said mold under compression;

and

cutting or machining said block with hand tools or machine tools.

14. (Original) The method of claim 13 wherein said desired form comprises pellets.

15. (Original) The method of claim 13 wherein said desired form comprises powder.

16. (Original) The method of claim 13 further comprising the step of kneading said biodegradable polymer with at least one of an ester plasticizer in an amount of about 35% by weight or less and a filler in an amount of about 50% by weight or less.

17. (Original) The method of claim 16 wherein said filler comprises an organic material.

18. (Original) The method of claim 16 wherein said filler comprises an inorganic material.

19. (Canceled)

20. (Currently amended) The method of claim †9 13 wherein said esterified starch comprises at least one of the following:

(1) an esterified starch prepared by esterifying a starch with an esterifying reagent of a vinyl ester in a non-aqueous organic solvent in the presence of an esterification catalyst;

(2) an esterified, polyester-grafted starch which is formed by esterifying starch and grafting starch with polyester; and

(3) a mixed esterified starch of which hydrogen in the reactive hydroxyl group of the same starch molecule is substituted with an acyl group that has from 2 to 4 carbon atoms (*i.e.*, a short chain acyl group) and an acyl group that has from 6 to 18 carbon atoms (*i.e.*, a long chain acyl group).

21. (Currently amended) The method of claim †9 13, wherein said esterified starch contains a starch ester having a DS of about 1.0 to 2.8, which is produced by a process wherein a purified starch containing at least 50% of amylose is reacted with an acylation reagent in the presence of a basic catalyst in an anhydrous aprotic solvent.

22. (Currently amended) The method of claim †9 13, wherein said esterified starch is one as prepared from a high-amylase starch having an amylose content of about 50% by weight or higher.

23. (Currently amended) The method of claim †9 13, wherein said esterified starch has a DS of about 1.0 to 2.8.

24. (Currently amended) The method of claim †9 13, wherein said biodegradable plastic material comprises a mixture of said biodegradable polymer and biodegradable polyester.

25. (Currently amended) The method of claim ~~19~~ 13, wherein said biodegradable plastic material contains, as a side component, an ester plasticizer in an amount of about 35% by weight or smaller, to have a glass transition temperature falling between about 65 °C and about 120 °C.

26. (Currently amended) The method of claim ~~19~~ 13, wherein said biodegradable plastic material contains an organic or inorganic filler in an amount of about 50% by weight or smaller to have predetermined dimension stability, heat resistance and strength.

27. (Original) The method of claim 26, wherein said organic filler is cellulosic fiber.

28. (Original) The method of claim 27, wherein said cellulosic fiber is cellulosic microfiber having a mean length (L) of from about 20 to about 750 μm , and a mean diameter (D) of from about 5 to about 80 μm , wherein the ratio L/D is in the range of about 3 to about 60.

29. (Canceled)

30. (New) The method of claim 13 wherein said step of cutting or machining comprises machining using a numerically controlled machine or a lathe.

31. (New) The method of claim 13 wherein said model comprises a patterning model for use in producing a final product comprising a prototype, a master model, a styling model, a design model, a foundry pattern, a crafting model, a copying model or a model for confirming a tape for a numerically controlled machine or a lathe.

32. (New) The method of claim 13 wherein said model comprises a patterning model for use in producing a final product in the group consisting of a prototype, a master model, a styling model, a design model, a foundry pattern, a crafting model, a copying model and a model for confirming a tape for a numerically controlled machine or a lathe.